The Noise of Mediation: Dorothy Richardson's Sonic Modernity

Abstract

With recent scholarship on sonic modernity as its background, this article turns to Dorothy Richardson (1873–1958), a writer highly attuned to auditory culture and the aural dimensions of experience. I look first at Richardson's journalism, focusing on her writing on the American composer George Antheil, and her column for the early film periodical, *Close Up*, in which she reflects on the coming of sound to cinema. Moving then to her novel-sequence *Pilgrimage*, I consider her presentation of the new sound technologies of the telephone and the gramophone. In contrast to her modernist contemporaries, Richardson grants equal importance to the mediatory noise of the telephone and the gramophone as she does to the sounds these technologies were designed to transmit. For Richardson, mediatory noise becomes a conceptual locus as she takes soundings on the dynamics and permutations of mediation. To conclude, I look at the implications that Richardson's interest in the noise of mediation has for modernist aesthetics in the novel.

The emergent sound technologies of the late nineteenth-century were not just listened to for the sounds they were designed to emit. Thomas A. Watson, Alexander Graham Bell's assistant, recalled spending "hours at night in the laboratory listening to the many strange noises in the telephone […] [o]ne of the most common sounds was a snap, followed by a grating sound that lasted two or three seconds before it faded into silence, and another was like the chirping of a bird."[1] Thomas Edison was also listening to the extraneous sounds produced by his inventions. In a legal caveat of May 1878 on the phonograph, Edison proposed magnetizing the "reproducing point" that – through contact with a piece of tin-foil – produced sound, as "this will give good articulation free from the scraping noise of the point on the foil, for in this case it does not touch the foil but is worked by magnetic attraction."[2] Snaps, gratings, chirpings, and scrapings: there was more to the telephone and the gramophone than the voice or music.

Despite the separate technologies they engage with and the fundamental differences between transmitted and reproduced sound, Watson and Edison both address the same phenomenon – the by-products of sonic mediation. Watson's initial

[1] Thomas A. Watson, *Exploring Life: The Autobiography of Thomas A. Watson* (New York and London: Appleton, 1926), 81.

[2] Thomas Edison, "Caveat: Phonograph" [Caveat 80; May 29, 1878]: 310, in *Thomas A. Edison Papers*, Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, accessed 3 September 2018, http://edison.rutgers.edu/yearofinno/TAEBdocs/Doc1341_PhonoCaveat_5-29-78.pdf?DocId=D7828ZAS. In this instance I have referred to the phonograph, since this was Edison's own term for his device. However, in this article, I have followed generic usage by referring to the phonographic assemblage throughout as the "gramophone." This term in fact derives from the trademark for a device developed by Emile Berliner subsequent to Edison's invention.

"theory" about these by-products was that "the currents causing these sounds came from explosions on the sun or that they were signals from another planet" – they were certainly "mystic enough," though he "never detected any regularity in them that might indicate they were intelligible signals." In his 1910 *History of the Telephone*, Herbert Casson saw Bell's laboratory, and Watson's particular receptivity to the unintended sounds that emanated from it, as indicative of the fact that "the telephone had brought within hearing distance a new wonder-world of sound."[3] In the late-nineteenth century, when listening to music on a gramophone or to a voice through a telephone, only the medium was new – even though altered in transmission, the sound was still familiar. The novelty of the medium might have been appropriately apprehended, then, through Watson's means. "I, perhaps, may claim to be the first person who ever listened to static currents," Watson claimed.[4] In the process, he inaugurated a history of listening that understands mediatory noise as a phenomenon in itself, as well as a powerful figure of newness.

But in the mainstream history of listening, it is Edison's caveat on the phonograph that sets the normative standard for understanding the by-products of sonic mediation. Edison's desire for "good articulation free from the scraping noise of the point on the foil" is framed as one of a number of "certain new and useful Improvements in means for Recording Sounds and in Reproducing such Sounds from such Record."[5] Here, Edison anticipates a later development within the science of acoustics. Following Robert Breyer and Karen Bijsterveld, Mara Mills has shown how initially, early twentieth century acousticians "had classified noise as irregular or nonperiodic sound," and that, as a consequence, "some sources of noise continued to be defined according to their frequency characteristics rather than their desirability." But increasingly, Mills notes, a wider definition of noise as "unwanted sound" entered the discourse about sonic mediation: the kinds of sounds heard by Watson and Edison were soon deemed "intrinsic to the medium but extraneous to the signal."[6] Edison set a standard for the description of sound technologies that prevails to this day. From noise-cancelling headphones to the inexhaustible advances of high fidelity speakers, mediatory noise is still unwanted sound – a waste product to be rejected, diminished, or ignored.

As the emergence of reproduced and transmitted sound was roughly coterminous with the first flourishings of artistic modernism, it is no surprise that representational

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[3] Herbert N. Casson, *The History of the Telephone* (2nd edn; Chicago: McClurg, 1910), 120.
[4] Watson, *Exploring Life*, 82.
[5] Edison, "Caveat: Phonograph," 299.
[6] Mara Mills, "Deafening: Noise and the Engineering of Communication in the Telephone System," *Grey Room* 43 (2011): 123.

artworks of the early twentieth century resonate to the sounds of telephones and gramophones. As a consequence, the regime of what Tim Armstrong has called "sonic modernity" has developed its own substantial scholarly field in recent years, especially in literary studies.[7] Watson's account of his early experiences with the telephone should be relevant here: in portraying mediatory noise as a locus of ruptural novelty in the history of listening and a generative source of epistemological instability, Watson is in harmony with a set of pre-eminently modernist concerns. And yet when representing sound technologies, modernist writing tends either to ignore mediatory noise or to echo Edison's assumptions about it instead.

The noise produced by Leopold Bloom's imagined gramophone in *Ulysses* is mere interference to a posthumous message ("Kraahraark! […] kraark […] krpthsth"); in nighttown, meanwhile, Joyce deems the extraneous noise of the gramophone to be unwanted sound, as summed up by 'THE THREE WHORES' who, '*Covering their ears, squawk*' as '*The disc rasps gratingly against the needle.*'[8] In Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924), as the doctor Hofrat Behrens exhibits his new gramophone, one short sentence describes a "low whetting sound" before the desired music sounds out, as if mediatory noise were the noise of preparation, necessary if unwanted – and not just in and of itself, but by Mann's narrative too.[9] The experience of the telephone in many modernist novels is certainly noisy too, but the noise admitted is often ambient, or ambiguous as to its source. Modernism's most famous telephonic exchange, in Marcel Proust's *Le Côté de Guermantes* (1920–1), is preceded by much unwanted sound. Arriving at the post office, Proust's narrator enters the booth to find that "the line was engaged, somebody was speaking who probably did not realize that there was nobody there to answer him, for as I took the receiver, the dead piece of wood began to speak like Punchinello." So the narrator "silenced it, as I would a puppet, by putting it back on its hook." The "convulsions of this vociferous stump" are never fully explained. When the desired sound of the grandmother's voice eventually comes through the telephone it is

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[7] See Tim Armstrong, "Player Piano and Sonic Modernity," *Modernism/modernity* 14 (2007): 1–19.
[8] James Joyce, *Ulysses: The 1922 Text*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 109, 478.
[9] Mann's original reads "Ein leicht wetzendes Geräusch" (Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Stockholm: S. Fischer, 1954), 908). The problem of translating this phrase exposes the pressure mediatory noise places on its linguistic description. The first English translation – which I have followed here – by H. T. Lowe-Porter, attempts to render Mann's text as literally as possible (Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H. T Lowe-Porter (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), 637). However, John E. Woods's more recent translation seeks to explain the metaphor at work in Mann's word-choice: "A soft sound, like someone whetting a stone" (Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Knopf, 2005), 759). Put into Google Translate, Mann's phrase is given more idiomatically for the twenty-first century, offering a "whirring noise."

prefaced by "a few seconds of silence."[10] Proust's trope of the Punchinello puppet demonstrates the conceptual pull of the telephone's primary function. Whatever noises are being heard from the telephone, they are described entirely within the ambit of the voice and the circuit of communication – the rest is silence.[11]

As a counter, this article turns to the British writer Dorothy Richardson (1873–1957). In her journalistic writing and her thirteen-volume novel sequence *Pilgrimage* (1915–67), Richardson shows herself to be a vital and original theorist of sonic modernity. In her writing for periodicals on the composer George Antheil and on the auditory dimension of the cinema, as well as in her descriptions of the telephone and the gramophone in her novels, Richardson was compelled by the same subjects as many of her more prominent modernist contemporaries. But in particular, Richardson's fiction is distinguished by its primary attunement to the mediatory noise made by the new sound technologies, rather than the sounds these technologies were conventionally associated with. Rejecting the Edisonian notion of mediatory noise as unwanted sound, Richardson participates instead in the tradition initiated by Watson, apprehending the phenomenal qualities of such noise. In giving over her attention to mediatory noise, Richardson integrates it into a broader spectrum of modernist noise that included the soundscapes of the city, the factory, the battlefield, and much more. Richardson's writing explores the fact that, as James G. Mansell has it, in the early twentieth century noise "was not just representative of the modern; it *was* modernity manifested in audible form" – noise "allowed commentators to express what it *felt* like to be living in modern times."[12]

Richardson is equally attentive to the fact that mediatory noise both exceeds and falls short of sociological or technical description. As with Watson, her writing betrays a constant slippage between description and theorization, between the search for causes and the privileging of effects. The mediatory noise produced by sound technologies

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[10] Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, trans. Mark Treharne (London: Penguin, 2003), 131 ("le ligne était prise, quelqu'un causait qui ne savait pas sans doute qu'il n'y avait personne pour lui répondre car, quand j'amenai à moi le récepteur, ce morceau de bois se mit à parler comme Polichinelle; je le fis taire, ainsi qu'au guignol, en le remettant à sa place […] les convulsions de ce tronçon sonore […] quelques instants de silence." *A la recherche du temps perdu II: Le Côté de Guermantes; Sodome et Gomorrhe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 134).

[11] Proust's use of the analogy of a puppet, and particularly one within the Pulcinella tradition, finds an uncanny double in an early piece of British writing on the telephone. In 1880, the General Secretary of the Post Office, John Tilley, produced a report regarding the Edison telephone for the Postmaster General, following the opening of the first Bell and Edison exchanges in London. Tilley described being unable to distinguish the speech of his interlocutor – instead, he said, the sound "strikingly resembled an exceedingly bad street Punch." Quoted in Michael Kay, "Inventing Telephone Usage: Debating Ownership, Entitlement and Purpose in Early British Telephony" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2014), 19. I am grateful to Coreen McGuire for first alerting me to this fact, and to the citation as well.

[12] James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 1.

poses a literary problem for both Richardson and Watson, resulting in a productive search for a language and a form that accounts for it. In the process of writing on the mediatory noise of sound technologies, Richardson reaches a similar definition to Greg Hainge, who has recently emphasised noise's status as "the very precondition for expressivity that is born only as an unintended yet inexorable consequence of expression itself." But the flexibility and expansiveness of Richardson's writing allows her to go further, not just to depict mediatory noise on similar terms, but also to explore the ways such terms can gain figurative import. Richardson's writing hears doubly, finding a space both to describe mediatory noise as such, and also to develop it as a central trope for a literary project that is profoundly and expansively concerned with mediation. By attending to the most alien, almost abstract form of noise, and harnessing the adaptability of such abstraction to metaphor, Richardson dialectically returns her reader to a material and social world that is densely mediated. This dialectic is also, in some reckonings, what modernist form seeks to achieve. As such, this article concludes by considering how Richardson's writing not only contributes to the discourse of the 1910s and 1920s on sonic modernity, but also orients this discourse in relation to contemporaneous explorations in the aesthetics of the novel.

Richardson's Journalism

Journalism was one of Richardson's main sources of income. Her writing in this form covered a diverse range of subjects, from dentistry and Quakerism, through punctuation, literature, and philosophy, to feminism and socialism. Running through this work is a distinct strain of thinking about auditory culture. Most significantly, in 1925, Richardson wrote an article for *Vanity Fair* about one of sonic modernity's signature figures, the American composer George Antheil.[13] This article, titled "Antheil of New Jersey," was published at the height of Antheil's fame – a year after Ezra Pound published, as William Atheling, his book *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, and a year before the first public performance of the *Ballet mécanique*, which had been written for Fernand Léger's 1924 film of the same name. As well as Pound and Léger, Antheil's collaborators and artistic

[13] Josh Epstein is particularly perceptive on Antheil's cultural centrality in the 1920s, pointing out, for example, that by virtue of his work on Antheil, Ezra Pound "was at times seen, even if he was not in fact, to be hitching *his* wagon to *Antheil's* star." Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 106–7.

interlocutors included Nancy Cunard, T. S. Eliot, Max Ernst, James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, Olga Rudge, Erik Satie, and W. B. Yeats. Writing in 1926, the composer Aaron Copland described Antheil as "the most notorious" of America's "radical" composers, possessing "the greatest gifts of any young American now writing," although "the very violence of his own sincere desire to write original music has hindered rather than helped the attainment of his own ends."[14]

Richardson was more convinced of Antheil's successes than Copland, although equally persuaded by his innovations. However, her article begins at a remove, with a childhood memory:

> Whenever, in memory, I hear my grandfather protesting, as sedulously I practiced Chopin: "very fine, my dear, but Mendelssohn will outlive these new-fangled torturings of melody," I suffer sorrow for those who see the golden vessels into which they have poured the treasures of a lifetime give place to tin pots, brand new and empty, and I wonder over the persistence of the belief that the new is always the inferior and the rising generation always wilfully plunging into an abyss. But my grandfather's words when they were uttered evoked not pity or wonder but only wild and vain desire for words to express what it was in this new music that touched me more nearly than what I then knew of the old.

The article then describes "just such another moment of delighted recognition" in a chance hearing while walking the London streets of "a fragment of sound, not melody, new-fangled or otherwise, an abrupt angular little phrase flung from a music-machine into the rain-darkened street as I passed the open door of a *Wonderland—Entrance Free*." Leaving her "shocked and delighted in a new world," Richardson explains how for her the sound anticipated the "as yet undiscovered" music of jazz, the "sunny dancing quality of this music, its inconclusiveness, its way of belonging nowhere."[15] This chain of associations takes up the first column of text in Richardson's article. By proceeding along such a circuitous route to her main subject, Richardson establishes a precise, if highly complex definition of the aesthetic novelty that inheres within Antheil's work. For Richardson, this novelty sits ambiguously at the interface of the object and the perceiving

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[14] Aaron Copland, "1926: America's Young Men of Promise," in *Aaron Copland, A Reader: Selected Writings 1923–1972*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 173.
[15] Dorothy Richardson, "Antheil of New Jersey," *Vanity Fair*, November 1925, 136. Hereafter cited in the text as *ANJ*.

subject – it is registered equally in Chopin's music and the music-machine's "little phrase" as it is in the differing and contingent affective responses of Richardson and her grandfather. Moreover, it can emerge as much from an encounter with a mere "fragment of sound" as it can from a traditional aesthetic object. Its temporality is doubled-over too, in the given examples accessed in recall, but also, with the case of the music-machine, anticipative of a jazz music that at the time of hearing was still to come – a past version of the future that, as shown below, is also key to Richardson's description of the gramophone in her novel *Deadlock* (1921).

The centrepiece of Richardson's article has this thoroughgoing definition of novelty "elaborated and intensified" at a concert given by Antheil. According to her biographer, Gloria Fromm, Richardson had seen Antheil perform his own music in London prior to a trip to Paris in 1924, when the city "was still talking about" his appearances there the previous year.[16] The London performance that Richardson attended, and that she recounts in "Antheil of New Jersey" was likely Antheil's recital at the Wigmore Hall on 22 June 1922. Richardson describes the appearance on stage of a "short square-built childlike youth" (Antheil was twenty-one years old at the time of this concert) who, after performing "a considerable amount of very cleverly experimental sound" and in the process losing "a portion of the audience, a bevy of seasoned concert-hearers, indignant," moves on to his own compositions (*ANJ*, 136). This description tallies with a review of the 1922 concert from *The Times*, which reports on Antheil's performance of his own "extremely 'modern'" compositions alongside pieces by Chopin, Debussy, "Albanez" (likely Albéniz), "and others," all executed with a "superficial" technique: "though he can be noisy and vehement and has plenty of facility and agility, it all sounded very dry and unconvincing."[17] Richardson, however, recalls the performance as consisting of "the continuous getting across of a strange new force. There were no more departures. There was interest, puzzlement, patience more than willing, an intense quietude" (*ANJ*, 136). Antheil embodies a force of novelty that makes up a key element of Richardson's understanding of sonic modernity.

As the article progresses, Richardson tries to understand the "strange new force" of Antheil's music by placing it in a widely-extending context. The music is registered collectively by the remaining audience members with "as near a sense of wild enthusiasm

[16] Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 168.
[17] "'Modern' Piano Pieces," *The Times*, 23 June 1922, 7. Prior to the publication of Richardson's article, Antheil performed his compositions another time in London on 10 May 1924, this time alongside Olga Rudge, who also performed "a troubadour tune," a gavotte by Bach, and two pieces by Ezra Pound: see "Week-End Concerts," *The Times*, 12 May 1924, 9.

as an English concert audience can get" (*ANJ*, 136). A comparable audience in Vienna is described as consisting of those who "were carried out swooning" while "the rest yelled the yell irrepressible that attends a first experience of a really steep toboggan run" (*ANJ*, 138).[18] Following the London performance, "[t]he artist's room buzzed with murmured phrases: modern life … primitive … barbaric … and so forth." Then, Richardson describes an initially taciturn Antheil opening up to her "about what is happening in modern art" – among other things, he "proposes to construct machines to make new musical vibrations for the purpose of the mathematical graphing of rhythms and groups of inter-rhythms and the exact reproduction of newly calculated musical spaces" (*ANJ*, 138). Antheil's biography is also rehearsed, his writings are directly quoted, and so too are the words of one of the earliest figures to write on his work, the German composer and critic Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt.[19]

Richardson concludes by searching for further language to convey Antheil's innovations:

> Not setting out to be original, wise only after the event of his own discoveries, he is an innocent and helpless innovator. It is too late to say that he is dangerous. He has bolted with us, and there is no going back. We can banish him to the wilderness but we cannot destroy the bridge he has built. (*ANJ*, 138)

The final lines of the article mention performances in the United States of "the early sonatas, the Joyce opera" – an abandoned adaptation of the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* – "and the *Ballet Mécanique* whose performance requires a cinema and sixteen pianolas" (*ANJ*, 138). This final list of information is indicative of Richardson's approach in "Antheil of New Jersey." From the neighbouring precedents listed at the opening of the article, through the descriptions of different forms of personal and collective response to Antheil's music, to the assembly of data about Antheil and his work, Richardson circles round the fact of Antheil's aesthetic novelty, testing and trying a variety of different

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[18] The exhilaration of the toboggan-run is an important figure in *Pilgrimage*. In *Backwater* (1916), the second volume of the sequence, Richardson's protagonist Miriam Henderson experiences an erotically-charged moment as she agrees to go on a toboggan with Mr. Parrow: "*Oh—ooooh*—how ab*solut*ely glorious, she yelled as they shot down through the darkness. *Oh*, she squealed into the face laughing and talking beside her." Later, in *Oberland* (1927), the ninth volume, Miriam experiences a more solitary and transcendent feeling of "the joy of streaming forward for ever through this moving radiance" as she coasts down a Swiss mountainside. Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage I* (London: Virago, 1979), 327–8; *Pilgrimage IV* (London: Virago, 1979), 85. Quotations from *Pilgrimage* are hereafter cited in the text by volume number: *P1, P2, P3, P4*.

[19] See H. H. Stuckenschmidt, "Umschau: Ausblick in die Musik," *Das Kunstblatt* 7 (1923): 221–2.

forms for its critical description. As discussed below, it is in the description of mediatory noise in her fiction that such a technique finds its fullest expression in Richardson's work, with the widest ramifications both for her ideas about sonic modernity and about aesthetics in a larger sense.

Antheil resurfaces in a subsequent series of Richardson's writings. In "Almost Persuaded," the iteration for June 1929 of her "Continuous Performance" column in the film magazine *Close Up*, Richardson considers whether the arrival of sound to cinema will facilitate the "crashing of a barrier against which modern art has flung itself in vain," eroding the boundary-lines between different media and securing cinema as the "art-form of the future." Richardson offers Antheil as an example of someone who "drilled holes" in that barrier "when he 'composed' mechanisms (did not one of his works require sixteen pianos and a screen?)."[20] *Close Up* was edited by the filmmaker Kenneth Macpherson, with editorial and financial support from the writer Bryher, who encouraged Richardson's contributions despite Richardson's initial misgivings. In a letter of Spring 1927, Richardson approved of Bryher's plans for a film periodical but insisted that "I can't however see myself contributing, with my penchant for Wild West Drama & simple sentiment."[21] Nevertheless, "Continuous Performance" was first published in *Close Up*'s first issue, and appeared frequently throughout the magazine's short life between 1927 and 1933.[22]

Just as Richardson published "Antheil of New Jersey" at an auspicious time in Antheil's career, so did she come to write about cinema at a crucial moment in its history. *Close Up* coincided closely with the coming of sound to cinema: *The Jazz Singer*, usually considered to be the first "talkie," was released in 1927. Accordingly, as Laura Marcus notes, "Continuous Performance" became a forum for Richardson to articulate "her mourning for the end of the silent period," a space for "arguing that the multiple auralities of 'the talkies' […] fragmented the continuous stream provided by film music in cinema and its unifying aesthetic."[23] Even before sound film finds its way into her articles, Richardson is consistently attentive to the cinema as an aural experience. The

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[20] Dorothy Richardson, "Almost Persuaded," June 1929, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 191.
[21] Dorothy Richardson, letter to Bryher, Spring 1927, in *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, ed. Gloria Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 134.
[22] For a more detailed study of the discursive practices at play in Richardson's *Close Up* columns, see Jenelle Troxell, "Shock and 'Perfect Contemplation': Dorothy Richardson's Mystical Cinematic Consciousness," *Modernism/modernity* 21 (2014): 51–70.
[23] Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 405.

"unifying aesthetic" that Marcus discusses is a recurring theme, and though, as Richardson says, "a good orchestra can heighten and deepen effects," the ideal in this respect is "a piano played by one able to improvise connective tissue for his varying themes."[24] This ideal is shown, in the still-young medium, to be under threat by further innovations: "We dislike even the realistic pistol-shot that was heard once or twice during our period of great ambitions."[25] Richardson is preoccupied too with the sounds of the audience, describing the response of one boy in a cinema to a particularly dramatic nautical film as "a shriek I can never forget. It filled the silent hall, one pure high note that curved swiftly up to the next and ceased staccato; blissful terror in a single abrupt sound." In the same article she also accepts the "audible running commentary" of the audience as "one of the many incidental interests in a poor film."[26] At the same time, however, in a later column, as part of "manual of etiquette for the cinema" Richardson includes the injunction, "Don't be audible in any way unless the film brings you laughter."[27]

As with her discussion of Antheil, novelty is a primary concern throughout Richardson's *Close Up* columns. The response of the shrieking boy is emblematic of Richardson's cinema audiences, more often than not responding aurally to the shock of the new: one particularly lyrical column recalls "the hysterical laughter that greeted the first slow-motion pictures," which, Richardson says, "may be interpreted as joyous welcome for yet another revelation of the comic possibilities of the film."[28] But the coming of sound to film itself is the main locus of novelty for Richardson as she writes on cinema. Conceptualizing this radical shift in an article on an early experience of dialogue in film, Richardson reaches back to two telling precedents:

> We might be about to enter a new kingdom. […] We had wandered, moralizing; recalled the birth of gramophone and pianola, remember that a medium is a medium, and that just as those are justified who attempt to teach us how to appreciate Music and the Royal Academy, and Selfridge's so most certainly, how

[24] Dorothy Richardson, "Continuous Performance," July 1927, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 161. In consultation with the original, I have corrected a typo in the reprinted version of this quotation, which should read "his varying themes" rather than "this varying themes."
[25] Dorothy Richardson, "Musical Accompaniment," August 1927, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 163.
[26] Dorothy Richardson, "The Front Rows," January 1928, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 172.
[27] Dorothy Richardson, "(*Animal impudens* …)," March 1928, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 174.
[28] Dorothy Richardson, "Slow Motion," June 1928, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 182.

> certainly we had not until later any conception, must those be justified who attempt to teach us how to hear Talkies.[29]

She repeats this notion a year later as she recalls how, with the advent of sound in film, "we heard, as indeed, bearing in mind the evolution of pianola and gramophone, we had expected to hear, of the miracles of realism achieved by certain speech-films."[30] By coupling the gramophone and the pianola, Richardson substantiates Paul K. Saint-Amour's emphasis on the equal importance of the two sound technologies, "roughly coeval" as they were, and developing "in mixed relations of rivalry, symbiosis, intimacy, and indifference."[31] For Richardson, to understand the seeming revolution of speech in film, cinemagoers needed also to be conversant with recent technological developments within the realms of purely auditory culture. Sound film placed the cinema within an unfolding media history, not just in a technological sense but an epistemological one too. *Pilgrimage* attempts to do the same for the novel.

The Tunnel on the Telephone

There is little mediatory noise in either "Antheil of New Jersey" or Richardson's columns for *Close Up*. These writings are more indicative of the depth of Richardson's engagement with the cultures of sonic modernity, showing the wider contexts that her fiction can be conceived within. Nevertheless, two particular instances in the *Close Up* pieces link Richardson's journalism more directly to the representation of sound technologies in her novels. In her second column for *Close Up*, Richardson recalls an incident that "convinced me that any kind of musical noise [in the cinema] is better than none." At one screening, the orchestra fails to appear, and "the pictures moved silently by, lifeless and colourless, to the sound of intermittent talking and the continuous faint hiss and creak of the apparatus."[32] The same kind of occurrence accompanies her reluctant viewing of an early sound film. The inclusion of a song in the film passes Richardson's test: "because the sound was distributed rather than localized upon a single form, [it] kept the medium intact. Here was foreshadowed the noble acceptable twin of the silent

[29] Dorothy Richardson, "Dialogue in Dixie," September 1929, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 193.
[30] Dorothy Richardson, "A Tear for Lycidas," September 1930, repr. in *Close Up 1927–1933*, 196–7.
[31] Paul K. Saint-Amour, "*Ulysses* Pianola," *PMLA* 130 (2015): 16.
[32] Richardson, "Musical Accompaniment," 163.

film." But with the song finished, the audience is left with an "instantly flattened, colourless moving photograph," which "featured the subdued hissing of the projector. Apparatus rampant: the theatre, ourselves, the screen, the mechanisms, all fallen apart into competitive singleness."[33] Divested of the unity of silent film and musical accompaniment that, for her, constitutes cinema's ideal state, Richardson becomes fixated instead on the auditory trace of cinematic mediation: the hiss and creak of the projector.

In Richardson's descriptions of the telephone and the gramophone in *Pilgrimage*, mediatory noise also forms part of an auditory experience broken down into "competitive singleness." But in these fictional instances, a lack of unity is not perceived negatively, and instead facilitates the description of mediatory noise as a distinct phenomenon. Indeed "competitive singleness" is not far from the the first, oldest, and least value-laden definition of the *OED* offers for the word "noise" itself, namely "the aggregate of sounds occurring in a particular place or at a particular time".[34] And in *The Tunnel* (1919), the fourth volume of *Pilgrimage*, Richardson presents a telephone call as part of just such an aggregate of sounds. By including a description of the mediatory noise emitted by a telephone receiver within this soundscape, Richardson makes an implicit argument for the incorporation of such sound within the understandable spectrum of noise:

> The telephone bell rang. Through the uproar of mechanical sounds that came to her ear from the receiver she heard a far-off faint angry voice in incoherent reiteration. 'Hallo, hallo' she answered encouragingly. The voice faded but the sounds went on, punctuated by a sharp angry popping. Mr Orly's door opened and his swift heavy tread came through the hall. Miriam looked up apprehensively, saying 'Hallo' at intervals into the angry din of the telephone. He came swiftly on humming in a soft light baritone, his broad forehead, bald rounded crown and bright fair beard shining in the [g]loom of the hall. A crumpled serviette swung with his right hand. Perhaps he was going to the workshop. The door of the den opened. Mrs Orly appeared and made an inarticulate remark abstractedly and disappeared. 'Hallo, hallo' repeated Miriam busily into the telephone. There was a loud report and the thin angry voice came

[33] Richardson, "Dialogue in Dixie," 194.
[34] "noise, *n.*" I. 1. a, *OED*. This particular definition can be tracked back to the thirteenth century.

> clear from a surrounding silence. Mr Orly came in on tiptoe, sighed impatiently and stood near her, drumming noiselessly on the table at her side. 'Wrong number,' said Miriam, 'will you please ring off?' (*P2*, 45)[35]

This telephone call might constitute the first literary wrong number. It takes place as Miriam Henderson, Richardson's autobiographical protagonist, is at work in a London dentists' office. The narrative of *The Tunnel* is set around 1896, by which time – though the telephone was still a relative novelty as a communications technology – London had had a telephone exchange for more than a decade.

As noted above, for writers like Proust, interruptions or obstructions to the telephone's intended use are often compensated for at a figurative level, so the voice and the communicative circuit still prevail in descriptions of telephony. By contrast, Richardson uses failed communication and miscommunication to sideline the primary function of the telephone and foreground noise instead.[36] The telephone call in *The Tunnel* functions as a narrative event that draws in a number of different sources and understandings of noise. One of these is noise as unwanted sound. Miriam registers a range of sounds from Mr Orly, the dentist – his door-opening, his footsteps, and his humming – as well as the brief, abstracted and "inarticulate remark" of his wife. As the passage reaches its peak, Richardson wittily transmutes Mr Orly's noises into a final instance of a paradoxically noiseless noise, with his "drumming noiselessly" on a table. Whereas initially, given its intense focalization, the scene presents Mr Orly's noises as merely unwanted by Miriam, it is soon clear that Mr Orly is attempting to pre-empt Miriam's subjective viewpoint, coming up with noises that would be unwanted to her, so as to gain her attention.

With the unwanted sound in the passage so clearly attached to one strand within its descriptive assemblage, Richardson is able to show Miriam apprehending the mediatory noise of the telephone in non-evaluative ways. Spatial and affective vocabularies are Richardson's primary means here. Richardson conveys the literal distance between two interlocutors on the telephone through an analogous virtual sonic space. An abstract spatiality is rendered in order to capture the new technological experience at issue: hence the "far off faint angry voice," which arises "through" an

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[35] I have corrected "bloom" to "gloom" in this passage in line with the novel's first edition. See Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel* (London: Duckworth, 1919), 38.
[36] For further discussion of the range of auralities in *Pilgrimage*, see Cecilia Björkén-Nyberg, "Roll Out Beethoven," *European Journal of English Studies* 15 (2011): 15.

"uproar of mechanical sounds," with Miriam's own responses offered not "into" the telephone as physical object, but "into" instead an "angry din." In this passage, relatively concrete descriptors – an "uproar of mechanical sounds," "sharp angry popping" – fill a virtual sonic space. This conceptual dissonance emphasizes the ontological obscurity of the mediatory noise of the telephone – it is not easily placed, in any sense. The recurrence of the term "angry" in the passage registers a similar lack of fixity, passing from the "angry voice in constant reiteration" to a punctuation of "sharp angry popping," to, finally, the totality of "the angry din of the telephone." As the object of telephony, the voice is supposed to render any mediatory noise ignorable or forgettable. But in Richardson's account, the voice disappears *into* this mediatory noise, leaving only an affective remainder. Technologically speaking, everything heard through a telephone receiver is an electronic signal – it takes a listener to separate out the desired sound of the voice from the undesired noise of mediation. The trajectory of the word "angry" resists this separation, attaching to different elements of the telephone call as if to signify their technical identicality.

The passage ends with a change in tenor, as Miriam hears "a loud report and the thin angry voice came clear from a surrounding silence." Here, anger is reattached to the voice, and Richardson offers the – previously absent – notion of silence. By this point in the passage, Richardson has returned to the normative account of telephony: two voices, each surrounded by silence, communicate with each other (even if that communication is simply to work towards the mutual understanding of a miscommunication). In Richardson's evocation of silence, the noise of the telephone's mediation has receded. But the literary process she undertakes to reach this point enacts the elisions that the normative account of telephony must undergo to reach its object. Richardson recovers a soundscape of neglected mediatory noise, returning her reader to a more accurate representation of the experience, in the late nineteenth century, of using a telephone. At the same time, the sounds Richardson represents trouble her means of representation. Through the unresolved tension between literal and virtual, and the use of affect as something uncertainly attached to either subject or object, person or thing, Richardson finds a language that registers a new sound-world as well as the challenges that this sound-world poses to existing categories for listening, technology, and communication.

Richardson's sustained attention to the resonances of a wrong number constitutes a moment of significant strangeness in this part of *The Tunnel*. The passage in question is part of a long chapter of the novel that, in extensive detail, documents

Miriam's working day from beginning to end. A paragraph break follows Miriam's "will you please ring off?", and with it, the resumption of the rhythms of the working day. The rest of the individual section where the passage in question appears is concerned with Miriam's professional tasks, specifically the administrative and practical intricacies of sending off a denture to a patient, "Major Moke," whose name she does not recognize. Here, we see Richardson's dialectical approach in play: the removed quasi-abstraction of the telephone episode leads into an equally detailed description of the specificities of everyday experience.

Yet the passage on the telephone leaves a brief, double echo, which suggests that something bigger is at stake in Richardson's attention to noise. It transpires that, having gained her attention, the first thing Mr Orly wants to ask Miriam is not a pressing professional concern:

> 'What a lot of trouble they givya,' said Mr Orly. 'I say, what's the name of the American chap Hancock was talking about at lunch yesterday?'
>
> Miriam frowned.
>
> 'Can y' remember? About sea-power.'
>
> 'Oh,' said Miriam relieved. 'Mahan.'
>
> 'Eh?'
>
> 'Mahan. May-ann.'
>
> 'That's it. You've got it. Wonderful. Don't forget to send off Major Moke's case sharp, will ye?'
>
> Miriam's eyes scanned the table and caught sight of a half-hidden tin box.
>
> 'No. I'll get it off.'
>
> 'Right. It's in a filthy state, but there's no time to clean it.'
>
> He strode back through the hall murmuring 'Mahan.'
>
> (*PII*, 45–6).

Miriam then attempts to work out how to send off Major Moke's case. But she is interrupted as Mrs Orly appears to ask what her husband was asking for. Miriam's explanation is not given precisely in the narrative, but Mrs Orly's response suggests that Miriam has related Mr Orly's question about Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (1890), rather than his instruction about Major Moke:

'How funny,' said Mrs Orly hurriedly. 'I was just comin' out to ask you the name of that singer. You know. Mark something. Marksy. . . .'

'Mar-kaysie,' said Miriam.

'That's it. I can't think how you remember.' Mrs Orly disappeared and the two voices broke out again in eager chorus. Miriam returned to her tin.

(*PII*, 46)

Presumably, Mrs Orly is trying to recall the name of the German mezzo-soprano Mathilde Marchesi, who sung and taught across Europe before setting up a highly successful singing school in Paris in 1881.[37] The phone has been put down, its strange noises silenced, but issues of aurality still resound in the dentists' office, from the allusion to a famous singer, through both Mr and Mrs Orly's inaccurate hearings of half-remembered names and their subsequent "eager chorus" of conversation, to Richardson's own precise transcriptions of the spoken voice ("givya," "will ye?"). In privileging the mediatory noise of the telephone within this soundscape, Richardson establishes a pattern that she repeats with the next sound technology that appears in *Pilgrimage*.

The Gramophone in *Deadlock*

The experience of listening to a gramophone is described in *Deadlock*, the sixth novel of *Pilgrimage*, in a scene set around 1900 in the home of Miriam Henderson's sister and brother-in-law. As with her depiction of Miriam's experience on the telephone, Richardson is committed in this scene to a kind of prose high-fidelity in her description of the gramophone's mediatory noise. Though initially "like the crackling of burning twigs," the noise soon transforms so that "[t]he crackling changed to a metallic scraping, labouring steadily round and round, as if it would go on for ever" (*P3*, 96). Though the "round and round" motion suggests the motion of the gramophone itself, the sound is in fact the grammatical subject here. Again, for Richardson mediatory noise presents a

[37] See Elizabeth Forbes, "Marchesi family," *Grove Music Online*, 24 May 2018, http:////www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000017730.

difficulty in finding its own unique language, bleeding out instead into the surrounding descriptive economy of its production.

Watson's description of the mediatory noise of the telephone as a "new wonder-world of sound" suggests that one solution to the difficulty of portraying this kind of sound is to draw on the notion of novelty, something that Richardson had recourse to in her journalism. But in *Deadlock*, Richardson both affirms and denies this approach. Miriam has "never seen a gramophone yet" but has "heard them squeaking from inside public houses of course." Plus, as her brother-in-law Gerald starts the machine, Miriam is instantly taken back in time, her first proper encounter with a gramophone evoking another initial encounter with the related sound technology of the telephone: "She remembered her first attempt to use a telephone, the need for concentrating calmly through the preliminary tumult, on the certainty that intelligible sounds would presently emerge, and listened encouragingly for a voice" (*P3*, 96). Miriam's experience of the gramophone as both unprecedented and precedented echoes that of the reader of *Pilgrimage*: we have recourse to the earlier description of the telephone in *The Tunnel* – the first such description in the novel sequence, but clearly not a description of Miriam's own first experience on the telephone. Even at the sentence level, Richardson works to explore this tension between novelty and familiarity: with the clause "and listened encouragingly for a voice," Richardson returns to the narrative present without warning, and ambivalently. The encouraging listening is for a voice from the gramophone, but the abrupt shift from a remembered telephone to a present gramophone pulls against the grammar and imprints memory on the present scene: the voice at the other end of the past telephone would have undergone the same anticipative "listening for." *Contra* Watson's account, then, Richardson's claims for the novelty of the mediatory noise of sound technologies – as well as the novelty of apprehending their phenomenal aspect – are not absolute.

The "listening for" that Richardson describes also suggests one reason for the phenomenological oddity of mediatory noise: it simultaneously disrupts and makes necessary a selective form of listening. But Richardson ultimately resists selectiveness as mediatory noise's primary locus. As the scene in *Deadlock* unfolds, Richardson follows her earlier description of the telephone, exhaustively describing the experience of listening to the gramophone as a process, and an errant one too:

> an angry stentorian voice seemed to be struggling, half-smothered, in the neck of the trumpet. Miriam gazed, startled, at the yawning orifice, as the voice suddenly escaped and leapt out across the table with a shout—"Edison-BELL RECORD!" Lightly struck chords tinkled far away, fairy music, sounding clear and distinct on empty space remote from the steady scraping of the machine. Then a song began. The whole machine seemed to sing it; vibrating with effort, sending forth the notes in a jerky staccato, the scarcely touched words clipped and broken to fit the jingling tune; the sustained upper notes at the end of the verse wavered chromatically, as if the machine were using its last efforts to reach the true pitch; it ceased and the far-away chords came again, fainter and further away. In the second verse the machine struggled more feebly and slackened its speed, flattened suddenly to a lower key, wavered on, flattening from key to key and collapsed, choking, on a single downward-slurring squeak——
>
> 'Oh, but that's absolutely *perfect*,' gasped Miriam.
>
> 'You want to set it *slower* silly; it all began too *high*.' (*P3*, 96–7)

Even after the entry of the voice and then the "fairy music," Richardson shows that the mediatory noise of the gramophone persists, distinctly separate from the chords – it is a "steady scraping" perhaps not unlike the kind that Edison wished to eradicate. But as with her account of the telephone, this noise sounds out in a "remote" virtual space. When the terminology of genre enters ("a song began"), a synthesis is achieved. Now the noise is not accounted for, and sonic unity is stressed: the "whole machine seemed to sing," granted agency as it tries to "reach the true pitch." But if the normative account of gramophony has been achieved here – solely musical message, with vanishing mediation – Richardson continues to emphasise the singularity of this kind of mediated listening. As the poorly-wound machine slows down and eventually stops, we are reminded of the categorical difference between produced and reproduced sound. This kind of increasingly struggling, feeble, slackening, flattening, wavering, collapsing, choking, downward-slurring musical performance fails in a way that directly produced sound could not. While Richardson has ceased to portray the mediatory noise of the gramophone, the fact of mediation remains unavoidably in what she describes.

Immediately after this description, Richardson then narrates a second abortive attempt to play the record: to Harriett's ears it is "a funeral this time," but in its slowness it is "*glorious*" for Miriam. As the record is restarted a final time, the narration states that

Miriam believes that "no correct performance could be better than what she had heard." But listening "carelessly" to the third iteration, the "prelude sounded nearer this time" – a suggestion that a degree of "correctness" has been achieved. Once the voice has come in, Miriam

> ceased to attend; the bright breakfast-table, the cheerfully decorated square room bathed in the brilliant morning light that was flooding the upward slope of the town from the wide sky towering above the open sea, was suddenly outside space and time, going on for ever untouched; the early days flowed up, recovered completely from the passage of time, going forward with to-day added to them, for ever. The march of the refrain came lilting across the stream of days, joyfully beating out the common recognition of the three listeners. (*P3*, 97–8)

Richardson's reversal of the received polarity of mediated listening – first close concentration on the by-products of sonic mediation, followed by a careless reception of its intended object – is in one sense part of a broader attempt in *Pilgrimage* to consider the interplay between attention and distraction, and the social function of each. Bryony Randall points to daydream, for example, as an item in *Pilgrimage*'s repertoire of "those liminal and feminised states" which present "the greatest challenge to any attempted regulation of psychic energies" – the very sort that "Miriam vehemently resents and attempts to resist."[38] In *Deadlock*, Richardson explicitly invokes a distracted form of response ("ceased to attend") as a way of forestalling the resolution that her pattern of three attempts to play a record might conventionally provide: the narrative refuses to countenance a description of reproduced sound as conventionally understood, transfiguring the closest narrative instance thereof into a daydream of atemporal, collective communion.

Richardson holds off until the end of the paragraph for the daydream to end and for the song played on the gramophone to become the object of Miriam's listening: "It was partly, too, she thought, absence of singer and audience that redeemed both the music and the words. It was a song overheard; sounding out innocently across the morning" (*P3*, 98). Though mediatory noise and any markers of a faulty performance are no longer described, Miriam's revelation here still concerns the substance of mediated

[38] Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 84.

listening. Here, Richardson foregrounds the apparently sourceless, acousmatic listening that scholars such as Sam Halliday have shown to be a central dimension of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century auditory practice.[39] However, without gloss or explanation, the acousmatic dimension of what Miriam hears is quite quickly supplanted, as Richardson shows Miriam's thoughts drawn elsewhere: "She saw the sun shining on the distant hill-tops, the comrades in line, and the lingering lover tearing himself away for the roll-call. The refrain found her far away, watching the scene until the last note should banish it" (*P3*, 98). Initially, this allusion is not explained, and as the focus of the narrative is drawn away from the gramophone, we are left with a sense of the portrayal of the gramophone being concluded with a final, distracted reverie. Noise, mediation, and distraction function in this respect as Richardson's literary means of staving off any normative description of gramophonic sound.

The allusion in fact comes from Miriam having been moved into imaginative contact with the lyrics of the song she hears on the gramophone. This is only confirmed retrospectively, though. The scene progresses with the listeners being interrupted by the entry of Harriett and Gerald's young daughter. During this passage of narration, there is no further allusion to the music until Eve, Miriam's other sister, comes into the room "as the music ceased" – an intimation of the ways in which *Pilgrimage*'s narration as a whole follows the focus of its perceiving consciousness. Miriam is then shown to have "imagined a repetition of the song," internally practising her request: "Let's hear *Molly Darling* once more, she thought in a casual tone" (*P3*, 99). A reader might be confused here: "Molly Darling" is a popular song from 1871 by Will S. Hays, which contains no hill-tops or any form of roll-call.[40] The title is easily confused, though, with a popular song of the early 1900s, "Fare Thee Well Molly Darling," by Will D. Cobb and Kerry Mills. In its sheet music version, published by F. A. Mills in New York, this song is subtitled "(At the Call of the Roll I'll Be There)"; Richardson very clearly paraphrases the chorus:

> Fare thee well, Fare thee well, Molly darling,
> Let your eyes look again into mine,
> For the sun o'er the hill top is dawning,

[39] See Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 13. Halliday's study also looks at Richardson's work, with an extended discussion on "sound-space" in *Pilgrimage* (see *Sonic Modernity*, 54–9).
[40] Annotated editions of *Ulysses* tend to see an allusion to Hays's song when Molly Bloom reports being called "Molly darling" by Lieutenant Mulvey (see Joyce, *Ulysses*, 711).

And I'm far from my comrades in line,
There's a tear in your eye Molly darling,
And the face that I love fills with care,
But your heart mustn't fear
I'll be there Molly dear,
At the call of the roll I'll be there.[41]

In the song, the soldier's secret trysts expose him, and he dies under enemy fire in the arms of his beloved. The scene of conflict in the song is unclear, although the soldier's "coat of blue" – eventually shown stained with blood – suggests the U.S. army. In *Deadlock*, Miriam is very clearly transported into the scene of the song as she sees "the comrades in line." But even as the song comes to an end, and the "refrain found her far away, watching the scene until the last note should banish it," Richardson situates Miriam ambiguously, referring to the musical content that is heard ("refrain," "last note"), while at the same time still placing her within the imaginative topography of the song: Miriam is described as "far away," just as the soldier is far away from his "comrades." The refrain Miriam hears might also denote the bugle that the song's lyrics describe as having "sounded clear" at the beginning of its final verse.

Seemingly, the trajectory of the gramophone episode in *Deadlock* moves from a listening that hears nothing but the traces of mediation to a listening where mediation is entirely absent – even to the extent that Richardson's narration itself loses any traces of its own mediation, avoiding any narratorial shorthands for aesthetic distance ("she imagined" etc.) and transporting Miriam into the scene that the voice on the gramophone describes. But actually, for Richardson, mediation grounds the entire episode and beyond. The common pattern of *Pilgrimage*'s telephone and gramophone episodes is notable here: both pass through a detailed description of the mediatory noise of the sound technology in question, before ending with an allusion to a military text – Cobb and Wills's song in the case of the gramophone, and Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* in the case of the telephone.

The significance of this pattern is emphasized in *Deadlock*. After the scene with the gramophone has concluded, Richardson shows Miriam, returned to her Bloomsbury

[41] Will D. Cobb and Kerry Mills, *Fare Thee Well Molly Darling* (New York: F. A. Mills, 1902), 5. An early Columbia Phonograph Company recording, sung by J. W. Myers, is archived online by the University of California, Santa Barbara Cylinder Audio Archive, accessed 3 September 2018, http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/search.php?queryType=@attr+1=1020&num=1&start=1&query=cylinder4687.

lodgings, debating Englishness with her Russian lover, Michael Shatov. At one point in this debate, Miriam questions Michael's defence of a distinct English identity: "how can you say all these things when you believe we are grabbing diamond mines?" (*P3*, 109). As *Deadlock* is set around 1900, the diamond mines at issue must be South African, and evoke the on-going Boer War. Linked back through *Pilgrimage*'s network of allusions to the "sun shining on the distant hill-tops, the comrades in line" heard on the gramophone, the drawing-room in which Miriam listens to Cobb and Mills's song is suddenly situated within a surrounding military-imperial world-system. In this view, the idyllic domestic scene with its family sat round listening to reproduced sound is not a natural fact, but a social one, a form of social reproduction necessary to the continuation of a certain social structure. However intricate and abstract they are in description, Richardson's two portrayals of the mediatory noise of sound technologies gain their significance dialectically from their location, taking place in the overdeterminedly mediated spaces of the workplace and the home. In particular, gender mediates and is mediated by these spaces. Miriam's role as a low-paid and all-purpose clerical and technical assistant in a dentists' surgery – with all of the affective, intellectual, and physical labour it entails – derives from an encompassing patriarchal–imperial totality that offered only precarious places for women outside of the domestic norm, a norm represented in *Pilgrimage* by Miriam's sister and brother-in-law. Miriam's gendered experience provides access to this system in its lived reality, denaturalized and unveiled in its mediated aspect.

Histories of the telephone and the phonograph are intertwined with histories of gender. Lisa Gitelman, for example, has shown how histories of the telephone have often been structured according to the maxim, "inventing the telephone is manly; talking on it is womanly," and that the gramophone's status as a kind of "home convenience" occludes a technological archaeology where "it must be that homemakers helped *make* home phonographs, to the curious and complicated extent that they 'made' homes, once it is acknowledged that the lives of new media are not just public relations events, business models, or corporate strategies but fully social practices."[42] We can track such histories through Richardson's portrayal of the telephone and the phonograph in *Pilgrimage*. Among Miriam's reflections as she hopes the gramophone record will be played again is a feeling that "men have no sense of atmosphere. They only see the

[42] Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006), 61–2.

appearances of things, understanding nothing of their relationships" (*P3*, 100). As part of her account of gendered experience, Richardson uses the noises of the telephone and the gramophone as figurations that draw attention to these "relationships" – to the relationality and mediation that encompass every moment of Miriam's interior and social life.

On and On: Mediation and Modernist Form

Underlying my discussion in this article has been a basic question: why in *Pilgrimage* is Richardson – in contrast to her modernist contemporaries – so preoccupied with describing the mediatory noise of the telephone and the gramophone? I have offered three answers: first, because Richardson participates in a history of listening where mediatory noise is perceived as a phenomenon in and of itself rather than, as per the Edisonian norm, mere unwanted sound; second, because these descriptions are a particular and personal expression of Richardson's engagement with the wider cultures of sonic modernity, as also exhibited in her journalism; and third, because describing the mediatory noise of the new sound technologies provides a means of emphasising the fact of mediation in a narrative where mediation in a much broader sense is a primary concern. To conclude, I will continue along the third line, albeit at a different angle. The reason I list the three at this juncture is that an alternative answer to my question provides an awkward counter to each. A totalizing realist account of *Pilgrimage* might go something like this: Richardson is compelled to describe everything – and in great detail too – so when a telephone and a gramophone crop up in her narrative, she has no choice but to fully depict the mediatory noise necessarily produced by these two devices; to pursue the reason for her depiction of mediatory noise any further is to fallaciously pursue imagined depths in what is ultimately a surface aesthetic.

The latter view was in fact the primary critique of Richardson's fiction in her own time. This critique is unintentionally captured in an article for the *Egoist* in 1918 by the novelist May Sinclair. A largely appreciative piece, Sinclair's article is best known as arguably the first application in English of the term "stream of consciousness" to a literary text. In the article's most famous passage, Sinclair states that in Richardson's novels "[n]othing happens. It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's

stream of consciousness going on and on."[43] The same insight is conveyed on more explicitly negative terms in an anonymous review from 1920 of *Interim*, the novel in between *The Tunnel* and *Deadlock*. *Interim*'s reviewer criticizes Richardson's "strenuously realistic theory of the novel" and her production of a "transcript of life as it passes through the consciousness of a young woman, written down accurately and unedited." For this reviewer, ultimately, "[l]ife is a disordered business, and frequently unintelligible, but it is not the artist's duty to produce an imitation chaos."[44] Katherine Mansfield's concluding judgement upon reviewing the same novel for the *Athenaeum* is even more unsympathetic: Richardson "leaves us feeling, as before, that everything being of equal importance to her, it is impossible that everything should not be of equal unimportance."[45] In each of these accounts, the distinguishing characteristic of Richardson's fiction is said to be her *lack* of form, her insistence on admitting everything, as if novelistic form were exclusively a device to enable a writer to select, order, or analyze material.

Or, indeed, to mediate it. In his assiduous genealogy of the "media concept," John Guillory argues that the "emergence of the media concept in the later nineteenth century was a response to the proliferation of new technical media – such as the telegraph and phonograph – that could not be assimilated to the older system of the arts." At the same time, Guillory notes, the "emergence of new technical media thus seemed to reposition the traditional arts as ambiguously both media and precursors to the media."[46] The emergence of modernism concurrently with the emergence of the media concept would confirm Guillory's point: in its reconfiguration of the traditional arts themselves, modernist form is an attempt to settle the question posed to these arts by the new technical media. This is Paul K. Saint-Amour's point about reading Joyce's *Ulysses* by factoring in the pianola, which enables us to "place literature in the fullest possible mediatic landscape" – for in "recovering the variety of media forms eclipsed by triumphal single-medium histories, we would begin to recognize how currently inert elements of a work threaten or prop up or provoke literature's self-concept."[47]

Richardson's portrayals of mediatory noise are just such an "inert element," both in her own work, and among contemporary literary depictions of the telephone and the

[43] May Sinclair, "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson," *Egoist* 5.4 (1918): 58.
[44] "New Novels," *Glasgow Herald*, 29 January 1920, 8.
[45] Katherine Mansfield, 'Dragonflies' (1920), in *Novels and Novelists*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1930), 140.
[46] John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2010), 321–2.
[47] Saint-Amour, "*Ulysses* Pianola," 32.

gramophone.[48] Pursuing Saint-Amour's terms a little further, then, what aesthetic "self-concept" can be gleaned from *Pilgrimage*? If, by portraying the telephone and the gramophone in her novel-sequence, Richardson is aligning her work with these media technologies, then by so keenly attending to their mediatory noise, she is also pointing to the fact that there is no transmission without resistance, no signal without noise. *Pilgrimage*'s noisy telephone and gramophone are figural centres in the novel sequence, drawing attention not just to mediated social experience, but also to this experience's mediation in fictional form.

Richardson's descriptions of mediatory noise read as pointed reminders that unresistant capaciousness and silent indiscrimination were *not* the formal underpinnings of her work. Instead, the particular mediating apparatus of Richardson's novels is revealed in the fact that it creates its own noisy by-products. As Miriam mistakes the title of Cobb and Mills's "Fare Thee Well Molly Darling," a reader could mistake Richardson's technique for something closer to the Joyce of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916): such errors of fact are the standard tokens of a narrative expressed through a subjective viewpoint, where the resistance generated between the perceiving consciousness's idea of a fact and that idea's real-world truth-value reveals focalization as such, creating space for an ironic distance to develop between narrative signifier and signified. But overall Richardson's writing is self-evidently much less invested in the potentials of ironized presentation than with a contemporary like Joyce. Similarly, Miriam's misnaming of Cobb and Mills's song is framed in a way that picks up a little noise from another modernist form: "Let's hear *Molly Darling* once more, she thought in a casual tone" (*P3*, 99). Does thought have a tone? Richardson does not have her second clause read "she imagined herself saying in a casual tone," nor does she separate out "Let's hear *Molly Darling* once more" with quotation marks. By avoiding such formal choices, Richardson short-circuits the easy attachment of her narrative technique to a notion of interior monologue, while still raising similar questions surrounding the representation of interiority in the process.[49]

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[48] For an artistic tradition that engages more actively with the mediatory noise of sound technologies, we would do well to turn to postwar Western avant-garde classical music: see, for example, David Tudor, *Three Works for Live Electronics* (Lovely Music LCD1601, 1996), or Eliane Radigue, *Feedback Works 1969–1970* (Alga Marghen alga040, 2013) [CD]. The career of Sonic Youth – emerging equally from the New York avant-garde and punk scenes of the 1970s–80s – also affords great importance to feedback, finding its purest expression in *Silver Session for Jason Knuth* (Sonic Knuth Records SKR1, 1998) [CD].

[49] See also Angela Frattarola, "Auditory Narrative Method in the Modernist Novel: Prosody, Music, and the Subversion of Vision in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*," *Genre*, 44 (2011): 5–27. For Frattarola, Richardson's attention to aurality is pointedly leveled against a visual account of experience: "stream of

In the critiques of Richardson's work discussed above, every detail is admitted and afforded equal (un)importance; the monotony of Sinclair's repetition of the phrase "on and on" is emblematic here, portraying Richardson's style as a kind of dogmatic economy of the same. To the contrary, the telephone and gramophone scenes discussed above represent Richardson's narrative technique in miniature. Just as Miriam's experiences of listening to the telephone and the gramophone fluctuate between deep immersion and removed estrangement, so too does the reader of *Pilgrimage* run through the same responses throughout the novel-sequence – one of the many subtle effects of Richardson's explorations within the literary form of the novel. If Richardson's narrative picks up the noise of neighbouring modernist forms in the process of transmission, then its distinct innovations can still be discerned. *Pilgrimage* creates a novelistic form that alerts us constantly to the fact that it is simultaneously distinct and generic, self-identical and also analogous to other contemporary texts. Compelled to navigate these two poles, an alert reader of *Pilgrimage* is thrown into a very particular experience of form *as form* – an experience of mediation as such in a sequence of novels where mediation is depicted and thematized throughout.

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consciousness often had to forsake a visual point of view and instead present the self as a membrane, with sounds flowing through the mind that are not perceived and explained as a rendered picture" (25).